

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method for restricting the distribution of negotiable discount coupons to individual consumers via a distributed processing network, the method comprising the steps of:
 - providing a server computer system accessible via the network, said system having a searchable database of discount offers, authorized by various participating merchants, for the purchase of specified goods and/or services, at least some of the offers being subject to restrictions imposed by the authorizing merchant with regard to the number of times a single consumer may take advantage thereof;
 - establishing a pool of registered subscribing consumers, each of whom may access the server via the network and obtain the information related to available discount offers;
 - providing sheets of security paper to each of the subscribing consumers; and
 - allowing each of the subscribing consumers to download and print from the server system, on the provided security paper and using a printer coupled to the network, negotiable discount coupons, each of which reflects an authorized discount offer, the number of coupons which may be printed by a single consumer for each authorized discount being limited in accordance with the imposed restrictions.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein said distributed processing network is the Internet .
3. The method of claim 1, wherein said security paper includes perforated tear lines, which facilitate the singulation of the individual coupons.
4. The method of claim 1, wherein printing by a printer coupled to the network is preceded by a printer calibration step, performed by the consumer, which ensures that each coupon, when printed on a sheet of security paper, is properly formatted.

1 5. The method of claim 1, wherein each printed negotiable discount coupon includes
2 tracking information, which identifies the subscribing consumer who printed it.

3 6. The method of claim 5, wherein each printed negotiable discount coupon also
4 includes a unique serial number, by means of which the coupon may be tracked and its
5 authorized use verified.

1 7. The method of claim 6, which further comprises the step of providing a database
2 program running on the server, into which merchants, who have received discount
3 coupons from subscribing consumers, may input coupon serial number and subscribing
4 consumer information, said database providing verification that any tendered coupon
5 has been used in compliance with the imposed restrictions, and further providing a
6 statistical analysis of the purchasing habits of the subscribing consumers who have
7 tendered discount coupons.

1 8. The method of claim 1, wherein said database contains information containing
2 multiple discount offers authorized by a single merchant, said multiple offers featuring
3 different levels of discount on the goods and/or services, the offers which feature lesser
4 discounts also imposing fewer use restrictions.

1 9. A method for providing negotiable discount coupons to individual consumers via a
2 distributed processing network, the method comprising the steps of:

3 providing a server computer system that is coupled to the network, and on which is
4 stored information related to certain discounts, authorized by participating merchants,
5 which may be applied toward the purchase of specified goods and/or services, at least
6 one of said discounts being restricted as to the number of times an individual consumer
7 may receive it;

8 establishing a pool of registered consumers, each of whom may access discount
9 information stored on the server via any remote computer system coupled to the
10 network;

11 providing sheets of security paper to each of the registered consumers; and

1 allowing each of the registered consumers to download and print from the server
2 system, on the provided security paper, negotiable discount coupons, each of which
3 reflects an authorized discount, the number of coupons which may be printed by a
4 single consumer for each authorized discount being limited in accordance with the
5 imposed restrictions.

1 10. The method of claim 9, wherein printing of the negotiable discount coupons is
2 accomplished by a printer coupled to remote computer system.

1 11. The method of claim 10, wherein printing of the coupons is preceded by a printer
2 calibration step, performed by the consumer, which ensures that each coupon, when
3 printed on a sheet of security paper, is properly formatted.

1 12. The method of claim 9, wherein each printed negotiable discount coupon includes
2 tracking information, which identifies the subscribing consumer who printed it.

1 13. The method of claim 12, wherein each printed negotiable discount coupon also
2 includes a unique serial number, by means of which the coupon may be tracked and its
3 authorized use verified.

1 14. The method of claim 13, which further comprises the step of providing a database
2 program running on the server, into which merchants, who have received discount
3 coupons from subscribing consumers, may input coupon serial number and subscribing
4 consumer information, said database providing verification that any tendered coupon
5 has been used in compliance with the imposed restrictions, and further providing a
6 statistical analysis of the purchasing habits of the subscribing consumers who have
7 tendered discount coupons.

1 15. The method of claim 9, wherein said security paper includes perforated tear lines,
2 which facilitate the singulation of the individual coupons

1 16. The method of claim 9, wherein said database contains information containing
2 multiple discount offers authorized by a single merchant, said multiple offers featuring
3 different levels of discount on the goods and/or services, the offers which feature lesser
4 discounts also imposing fewer use restrictions.

1 17. A method for allocating discount coupons to consumers, comprising the steps of:
2 enlisting at least one merchant who is willing to offer a discount on the purchase of
3 goods and/or services to a group of identifiable consumers;
4 registering a group of identifiable consumers;
5 providing a discount offer look-up and coupon printing service accessible via a
6 distributed processing network;
7 providing sheets of security paper to each of the registered consumers; and
8 allowing each of the registered consumers to access the service over the network,
9 and to print negotiable discount coupons on the provided security paper, the coupon
10 quantity printable by each registered consumer for each discount offer corresponding to
11 that authorized by the respective merchant.

1 18. The method of claim 17, wherein said distributed processing network is the
2 Internet.

1 19. The method of claim 17, wherein said security paper includes perforated tear lines,
2 which facilitate the singulation of the individual coupons.

1 20. The method of claim 17, wherein printing by a printer coupled to the network is
2 preceded by a printer calibration step, performed by the consumer, which ensures that
3 each coupon, when printed on a sheet of security paper, is properly formatted on the
4 security paper.

1 21. The method of claim 17, wherein each printed negotiable discount coupon includes
2 tracking information, which identifies the subscribing consumer who printed it.

1 22. The method of claim 21, wherein each printed negotiable discount coupon also
2 includes a unique serial number, by means of which the coupon may be tracked and its
3 authorized use verified.

1 23. The method of claim 22, which further comprises the step of providing a database
2 program running on the server, into which merchants, who have received discount
3 coupons from subscribing consumers, may input coupon serial number and subscribing
4 consumer information, said database providing verification that any tendered coupon
5 has been used in compliance with the imposed restrictions, and further providing a
6 statistical analysis of the purchasing habits of the subscribing consumers who have
7 tendered discount coupons.

1 24. The method of claim 17, wherein said discount offer look-up and printing service
2 contains multiple discount offers authorized by a single merchant, said multiple offers
3 featuring different levels of discount on the goods and/or services, the offers which
4 feature lesser discounts also imposing fewer use restrictions.

1 25. The method of claim 17, which further comprises the step of providing a printing
2 control program and a reservation system, said printing control program limiting the
3 number of negotiable discount coupons that may printed immediately prior to or during
4 peak business periods at a particular business, said printing control program accessing
5 said reservation system so that a consumer, who is denied printing of a coupon for
6 immediate use at a particular business, may book a reservation at that business for a
7 weekday or for a subsequent peak period.